Preface to the Special Section on E-branding

ANDREAS HERRMANN AND ERIC J. JOHNSON

Marketers know what a brand is in the physical world: the sum, in the consumer’s mind, of the personality, presence, and performance of a given product or service. These ‘3 Ps’ are also essential on the World Wide Web. In addition, digital brand builders must manage the consumer’s online experience of the product, from first encounter through purchase to delivery and beyond. Digital brand builders should care about the consumer’s online experiences for the simple reason that all of them – good, bad or indifferent – influence consumer perceptions of a product’s brand. To put it differently, on the Web, the experience is the brand.

Yet many marketers, particularly those whose experience is limited to the offline world, lack a coherent framework and concrete methods for achieving the broader objectives of online brand building. These marketers need an approach for aligning the promises they make to consumers, the Web design necessary to deliver those promises online, and the economic model required to turn a profit. These three elements – the promise, the design and the economic model – together form the inseparable components of a successful Internet business, or what might be called a digital brand.

Creating winning digital brands requires managers to reconsider how they view both the Internet and branding. Offline brands have long thrived by delivering narrow solutions to limited customer needs. Online, however, customers have learned to expect that the companies they patronize will meet a much fuller spectrum of their needs and desires. To succeed online, those companies will have to create full-fledged Internet businesses, or digital brands, that can fulfill this expectation.

The special focus theme on e-branding in this issue is started off with an analysis of the role trust and reputation play in online retail. Sabine Einwiller, in her article ‘When Reputation Engenders Trust: An Empirical Investigation in Business-to-Consumer Electronic Commerce’, aims to develop a comprehensive concept and measure of trust in business to consumer commerce. This includes a conceptualization and method of measuring both Internet vendor and system reputation, since reputation of both types is deemed as antecedent to trust. Her ultimate aim in the paper is to test the interrelationship of both vendor and system reputation and trust dimensions within the context of B2C e-commerce. The results of her empirical study support the validity of a differentiated conceptualization of trust.

The second paper in this section, ‘The Impact of Visiting a Brand Website on Brand Personality’ by Brigitte Müller and Jean-Louis Chandon, investigates how the

Authors

Andreas Herrmann
(Andreas.Herrmann@unisg.ch) is Professor and Director at the Institute for Media and Communications Management of the University St Gallen. At the MCM, he focuses on the design of media and product management. He has published widely about branding, pricing and marketing research.

Eric J. Johnson
(ejj3@columbia.edu) is Norman Eig Professor of Business at Columbia Business School, Columbia University and Director of CEBiz, the Columbia Center for Excellence in E-Business (www.cebiz.org). Professor Johnson has a strong research and teaching interest in e-commerce. His other interests include consumer and managerial decision making and brand equity. His articles have appeared in consumer, marketing, management science and organizational behaviour journals.
perceived personality of a brand is affected by exposure to the brand’s Internet site. The authors examine this question by reference to three indicators, product type, extent of involvement with the product category, and attitude towards the website. Based on their empirical study of this issue, they conclude that the overall perception of general brand attributes such as youthfulness and sincerity of an existing brick and mortar brand are positively influenced by a forced visit to the brand’s website. However, this finding does not hold where research subjects had extended involvement with the brand. The authors theorize that in cases such as these, where the brand may be a luxury label, attributes such as youthfulness could be an undesirable association with the brand’s personality.

The final contribution to the special focus theme section is ‘The Use of Domain Names in e-branding by the World’s Top Brands’ by Jamie Murphy, Laura Raffa and Richard Mizerski. Their research explores the domain name registration strategies pursued by the world’s top brands. They explore and benchmark domain name use by the world’s top 75 brands, hypothesizing that brands with larger value would tend to register more e-brand domain names both globally and in individual countries; beyond this, they hypothesized that Internet or new-media-related companies should not only be more attuned to the value and importance of global and national domain names, but also to the possibility of gripe sites and parasites. The results of the study indicate that while companies with the top brands are aware of the importance of global and national domain name registration in relation to their brand, their awareness of gripe sites and parasites could be higher.

We hope that these three papers enrich the discussion surrounding the topic of e-branding, and that you read them with pleasure.